

genius that lies across the pages of the
 letters; but there is
 one more disillusion here than even the
 poems show-
 disillusion about his poetry itself. He early
 expresses a
 sense of failure. He feels that he is trying to
 animate a
 corpse; that he is but the ghost of an
 Elizabethan drama-
 tist, squeaking and gibbering in plays that
 are fit only for
 audiences long lapped in their winding-
 sheets. 'The man
 who is to awaken the drama', he writes of a
remaniement
 of Massinger's *Fatal Dowry*, 'must be a bold
 trampling
 fellow—no creeper in worm-holes—no reviser
 even,
 however good. These reanimations are
 vampire-cold—we
 want to see something that our great
 grandsires did not
 know.' He must have felt the relevance of that
 judgement
 to himself. And if he is severe on his
 contemporaries,
 prophesying after Shelley's death 'nothing
 but fog, rain,
 blight in due succession', he is still harder on
 his own work;
 'I am essentially unpoetical in character,
 habits, and ways
 of thinking: and nothing but the desperate
 hunger for
 distinction so common to young gentlemen
 at the Uni-
 versity ever set me upon rhyming' (rather in
 the same
 way, it may be remembered, he denied
 himself a heart).
Death's Jest-Book he dismisses as
 'unentertaining, un-
 amiable, and utterly unpopular'. He finds
 himself want-
 ing in the two indispensable qualities of a
 dramatist,
 'power of drawing character, and humour'.
 Indeed at

moments he feels 'doubt of my aptitude for
any higher
literary or commercial occupation'. He
cannot even
finish his plays: 'As usual I have begun a
new tragedy;
'a new tragic abortion of mine has
absolutely extended
its foetus to a quarter of the fourth act';
'those three acts,
which I cannot possibly show to any eye but
that of
Vulcan, are absolutely worthless'. What
wonder if this
hesitating Prince of Denmark begot no
second *Hamlet*,
but only dramatic fragments and brilliant
incoherencies?